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STEPS SCHOOL DISTRICTS CAN TAKE NOW TO REDUCE THE BURDEN OF SCHOOL MEALS VERIFICATION IN THE FUTURE

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 made changes to the certification and verification processes for free and reduced-price school meals that result in new requirements for state child nutrition agencies and local educational agencies (LEAs). Implementing the steps below will require an initial investment of staff and resources, but over time will reduce verification paperwork and improve program integrity, connect low-income children to the free or reduced-price meals for which they qualify.

Reduce the Size of the Verification Pool

Categorical Eligibility: Effective July 2004, all homeless, runaway, and migrant children are categorically eligible for free meals once identified by a homeless education liaison, shelter director, migrant education coordinator, or other appropriate official. Once identified, such children do not have to submit an application to receive free meals and are not subject to verification.

Direct Certification: School districts are required to directly certify children in households receiving food stamp benefits when the household returns the letter from the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) to the district, or when that student is included on the county food stamp report. When a child is directly certified, the household is not subject to verification.

Central Application Filing: School districts should file all family applications in one central location rather than maintaining records in multiple locations. It is recommended that schools separate applications based on the categories listed on the Summary of Verification form (1.a. through 2).

Qualify for Reduced Verification Requirements

School districts will qualify for reduced verification requirements (i.e., same as current requirements) during the 2009-10 school year if it achieves a response rate of 80 percent or higher (i.e., a non-response rate of less than 20 percent) during the 2008-09 school year.

School districts are strongly encouraged to conduct aggressive follow-up to get 100 percent response rate during the fall 2008 verification process.

For more information, contact School Nutrition Programs at (406) 444-2501.

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